

15

With his mind boiling with a deadly combination of worry and rage, Eric paced back and forth across the conference room at the lodge. At the sound of the door opening behind him, he spun around and instantly strode forward. Standing in the open doorway stood Jason with a hard look in his eyes.

“How are they?” Eric asked anxiously, his words emerging harsher than he intended.

Upon arriving at the lodge over an hour ago, he’d roared at every one of his pack members until Healer Terra had been brought to look at his children. The quiet doctor had eyed his mate with obvious disgust on sight and doing so had sent Eric’s temper skyrocketing.

After snapping at the wolf shifter to do her job, his mother had forced Eric to leave the infirmary, out of concern that he would upset Travis and Emma more with his outbursts. The image of Rebecca’s face as he’d been forced to leave the room had caused him to freeze. She’d looked at him with fear in her eyes as Emma still clung to her like a baby monkey. Though she had eyed him warily as he left he couldn’t help but remember the small look of longing that hid deep within her gaze.

Deep down he’d worried that in all the chaos that she’d seen a hint of his beast. Was that why the scent of her fear swam around her like a cloak? Staying from his mate instead of going to her and refusing to leave her side until her fear had subsided had been agony. He’d denied his beast’s instincts for too long where Rebecca was concerned. He could allow himself to lose her because of her fear. He needed to get back to her.

“Travis had a few cuts from the broken glass on the kitchen floor, but all injuries on him have already begun to heal. According to Dr. Terra; other than shock from the event, Emma is unharmed. She hasn’t let go of Rebecca even for a second. Even when Dr. Terra requested that Emma let go so she could be fully examined, Emma still held onto your human like a lifeline. Dr. Tessa obvious didn’t like that Rebecca was forced to stay as she looked over your daughter.”

Eric found his gritting together at the actions of the young, sour faced doctor. He knew why Dr. Tessa disliked Rebecca on sight, but it didn’t do anything to cool his temper. Wolf shifters were highly mistrusting of humans and with good reasons. But still; it didn’t change a thing for him. Rebecca was his mate and he didn’t like the thought of Rebecca being hated because of deeds of other human long dead.

With a heavy weight settling on his chest, he shook his head at the hopeless truth that loomed ahead of him. The truth was; even if he was successful in turning her, his pack would never accept Rebecca as his. Even if his mate had been a shifter of a different species instead of a human, wolves weren't known for accepting outsiders within their ranks.

He already could predict the mirroring looks of disgust on the elder's faces when he would present Rebecca to them. Without a doubt, he knew that they would prefer to kill her than accept her. The only way he could prevent further discord within his pack and assure her safety was to...let her go.

No.

His fists clenched at his sides until his claws sliced into his palms at the thought. No one would separate him from Rebecca, not even himself. The pack would accept her in time, if not; he would exile any that refused.

Stepping further into the room, Jason ran an exhausted hand through his long ruffled hair. "Anyhow; your mother helped Rebecca take Emma and Travis to the kitchen for a treat to calm them down. While Tessa was looking at your pups, we—" Jason's words were suddenly cut off as Eric stormed away from him with a distracted expression.

"What did Dr. Tessa say about Rebecca's injuries?" when Jason didn't answer, Eric slowly turned at the waist to look at him. His beta seemed to find the long conference table interesting as he avoided Eric's gaze. "Jason?" Eric said taking a slow step closer, his muscles tightening with every step. He'd never lashed out at one of his betas before, but Jason's refusal to answer him was pushing it.

Sighing, Jason rubbed tiredly at his face before he replied, "I don't know."

Eric's eyes narrowed. "What do you mean you don't know? I left you to guard her and my pups."

"I tried to talk her, but she refused."

Almost positive that he knew what Jason was telling him, Eric still found himself asking, "Refused what?" his words echoing with a growl.

"She claimed that she was fine and didn't need looked over. Dr. Tessa didn't seem concerned so she allowed Rebecca to leave with your pups and your mother."

Eric's eyes flashed with light as his wolf rose up at the thought of his mate walking around injured because a member under his control thought she wasn't worthy on concern. "I ordered for Dr. Tessa to examine all of them. What was unclear about that?" he hissed out in a low voice.

With a snarl, Eric turned his temper on the table to his right, slamming his fist into the center of the wood. With a loud boom, his fist struck the table so hard that it split in half, as he lifted his hand the two halves fell apart with a creaking groan before hitting the floor.

"Whoa. Isn't that the third table you've had to put in this room?" a deep teasing voice said from the doorway.

Spinning around, Jason and Eric's eyes fell on the man that stood leaning against the door frame casually. Dressed in jeans and a t-shirt, Eric took in his old friend; Mark. Mark; a cougar shifter was one of the few different shifters that his pack tolerated. For years, Mark had helped Eric by being his level headed ambassador to other Alphas across the different shifter territories.

Taking note of Mark's appearance, Eric couldn't help but notice his friend looked...tired. His usual dark blonde hair had grown out, carelessly shoved away from his face. His tan skin along his jaw was covered in thick stubble. Dark lines of weariness circled Mark's eyes, seeing this seemed to pull Eric from his rage.

"How long have you been standing there?" He bit out gruffly.

Shrugging his shoulders, Mark straightened from his leaning position. "Long enough to see that your temper and habit of destroying furniture still needs work." Striding across the space to them, Mark nodded respectfully to Jason before reaching into his back pocket. Pulling out a thick, folded envelope, he held it out to Eric with a slight smile. "Signed as promised."

"You got your Alpha to align with us?" Jason asked with a note of awe.

Cougars, like most cat shifters normally were rouges, refusing to form packs. Mark's Alpha; Theo had managed to convince the nomad cougar shifters of Maine to band together after many of their kind was targeted by human poachers. Mark's people; like the traditional wolf shifters, kept to themselves, which was why Eric had sought an alliance with them.

Taking the thick tan envelope from Mark, Eric nodded in acknowledgement. "Any issues obtaining his agreement?"

Shoving his hands in his front pockets, Mark's shoulders slumped as though he was carrying a heavy weight. "Sort of. His alliance comes with some conditions and a favor."

"What a surprise." Eric remarked sarcastically with a scowl. "We'll talk later." With a dismissive wave of his hand, Eric turned away from him.

Ignoring Eric's rude attempt to dismiss him, Mark remained, glancing first to Jason then to Eric's stiff back. "I heard you had some excitement today? Anything I should know about?"

For a moment, Eric seemed to simmer in his own thoughts before he answered. "Some cowards came to my house with guns and attacked my home today while my children were there."

Jason nodded at Mark's surprised raised eyebrows. "It's true."

"I wouldn't want to be them once you find them." Mark murmured with a slight wince. "Any clue who it was?"

Curious about the answer himself, Eric turned his attention to Jason. "Take Chris and some trusted hunters to my property and see if you can pick up any scents as soon as possible. I will remain here to make sure my pups—"and mate—"are protected."

Jason's mouth opened and closed several times before he was finally able to answer. "As-as I tried to tell you a moment ago, once Dr. Tessa was done with your pups, we went ahead and looked for signs of who attacked you—" abruptly Mark held up a finger and interrupted Jason with a smug grin.

"Am I the only one that's going to point out that Eric just said "mate"?"

Groaning in disgust, Eric realized he must have uttered the word aloud without realizing it.

So much for keeping it a secret. His wolf said smugly.

"Yes. I have found my true mate." He stated reluctantly. Much to his shock, Jason didn't seem shocked or even surprised by this news. His expression almost seemed as if he'd known already. Stilling, he felt like someone had punched him in the gut. His friends would never let him live this down.

“So you’re finally admitting it to yourself?” Jason asked with a nearly identical smug expression as Mark’s.

Shoving the envelope in his pocket, Eric moved toward the grinning duo. Yep. He was definitely never living this down. “You knew?” he asked Jason.

“Of course we knew, Eric. It was obvious from since the first time you introduced us to Rebecca. But we knew if we pointed it out it would only cause you to put more distance between the two of you. You had to come to the realization on your own.”

“Told you that hard head of you would come back and bite you in the ass one of these days,” Mark teased. “So, where is this mate of yours? I want to offer my condolences.”

Scowling at the teasing banter, Eric waved Mark’s words away. “As much as I would love to stand around the gab with you like a bunch of old women with nothing better to do, I have a more urgent thing to attend to.” to Jason, Eric said. “I want answers. Who attacked us and how is it we didn’t know they were there until it was too late?”

“As I have been trying to tell you, Chris and I looked into it already. There were no individual scent traces of anyone on your property.”

Shocked, Eric shook his head. “That’s not possible.” Beginning to pace back and forth as his thoughts raced, Eric spun back toward his beta with cold eyes. “Everything has a scent. There is no way that there could be nothing! Go over the scene again. Take as many shifters as you need to do it, but I will not let these cowards think they can threaten my family without consequences.”

“More trackers won’t make a difference, Eric. The only thing we were able to pick up was some sort of scent that I encountered when I was in Darkwood Springs months ago when Doyle Mackenzie had gotten kidnapped.”

Every muscle in Eric’s body froze as his heart and lungs seized up. With suspension, he took a slow step toward his beta. “Was it an overly sweet scent? Almost like a human scent mix with decade?”

Pressing his lips into a thin line before answering, Jason reluctantly nodded. “It was almost exactly that. I believe you know what we could be facing here.”

“Are we really considering this?” Mark asked, perplexed. “It’s not possible that they would target you, Eric. Is it?”

Rage mounting once more, Eric spun around and shoved past the both of them before he stormed down the hall to the main lobby. Heading toward his office, he took note of Chris talking with several male shifters near the door.

Uncaring what he was dealing with, Eric bellowed at him. “Chris! Get that damn bear on the phone in the next ten seconds!”

Storming to his office, Eric slammed the door open with so much force that the door swung toward the back wall and struck it with such force that it embedded the doorknob in the wall. Chest heaving, Eric was seeing red in that moment. It would appear that his new allies troubles had followed him home for some reason. He refused to allow such danger to touch his family. He had enough to deal with. With shifters disappearing and his pack turning against him, he couldn't fight an army of supernatural freaks too.